

Directorate of Intelligence
Office of African and Latin American Analysis

11 January 1985

NOTE FOR: Executive Secretary

Jay,

Bob Gates mentioned to me yesterday that the DCI wanted, by COB today, a short paper on the subject of Nicaraguan readiness to mount a new offensive against the FDN. I gather he is preparing himself for talks with Congress.

I have provided copies of this to the DDI, DO/LA, and NIO/LA.

[Redacted]

John L. Helgerson
Director

[Redacted]

Attachment:

[Redacted]

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TOP SECRET

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Sandinista Preparation for a New Offensive

1. We believe the Sandinistas have the capability to launch a major offensive against the Contras within a month, despite continuing logistic constraints, poor troop discipline, leadership problems and inadequate command and control. Sandinista public statements and military actions convince us that the regime is committed to eliminating the insurgent threat in the near term. [REDACTED]

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2. The timing for a major counterinsurgency campaign by Managua is propitious. The Sandinistas probably believe, for example, that the election and inauguration of President Ortega have given them more legitimacy abroad and protection against US pressure. The current dry season, which will extend through May, is favorable for both ground and air operations. Finally, the insurgents in the south have been reduced to only a few thousand and suffer from a tenuous supply line, so that the Sandinistas need fewer troops in this area. [REDACTED]

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3. The indicators of Sandinista preparations for an intensified fight against the Nicaraguan Democratic Force in the north include:

- President Ortega's recent statement that national defense is his top priority for 1985 and will consume 40 percent of the budget, compared to 25 last year.

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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4. In terms of military capabilities, the Sandinistas appear ready for a major offensive:

- They have brought overwhelming superiority in firepower, including longrange, heavy artillery, multiple rocket launchers, T-76 light amphibious tanks, and close air support into the areas of greatest anti-Sandinista concentration.
- At least five of the 10-12 MI-24 HIND helicopter gunships, which the Sandinistas received 29 October and 7 November and which they consider their principal counterinsurgency weapon, have been assembled.

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- The Nicaraguan military draft will permit the Sandinistas to augment the more than 26,000 troops already pitted against 14,000 insurgents.
- The Sandinistas' continuing flow of munitions and supplies and an ever increasing fleet of transport vehicles provides them assurance that they can continue prosecuting the war at a high level of intensity and with considerable mobility.

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5. Despite all these preparations, shortcomings continue to hamper Sandinista military operations and will hinder the efficiency of a wider offensive.

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An overall lack of education and training within the armed forces, moreover, has translated into poor leadership and performance.

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Subject: Sandinista Preparation for a New Offensive

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DDI/ALA/MCD: [] (11 Jan 85)

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